

PARENTS FLAG EDMONTON

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY/93

At our last meeting on Jan.9/93, we welcomed new members and had a nice turnout from other groups. I hear through the grapevine that many young people are coming out of the closet and they are thanking P-FLAG for being there to help them take the big step of talking to their parents. So lets pat ourselves on the back and continue being there for them.

NEXT MEETING
TUESDAY, FEB. 16/93 7:30 P.M.

For more information call Lynne at [REDACTED]

We will have a gay High School teacher as a guest speaker at this meeting.

Remember those P-FLAG dues! Also if you have any submissions for the newsletter call Joan at [REDACTED]

If any parent would like to do an interview on Gaywire (CJSR University Radio) call the G.A.L.O.C. office at [REDACTED] and leave a message. The program is on Thursday nights at 6:00 P.M.

Don't forget your valentine!!!! Happy Valentines Day everyone.



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PARENTS LIVE IN CLOSETS TOO

All of us who have struggled with the usual coming out questions tend to forget only too easily that our desire to maintain honest open relationships with those for whom we care has very serious implications for others. Parents are the ones most deeply affected, far more than siblings and other family members. It is often said, usually by parents of lesbians and gays, that "when a child comes out of the closet, the parents go into it."

The following article by Thomas H. Sauerman, abridged from material published originally by PFLAG, describes the how his particular coming out experience was triggered by the need to remain honest and open in his important personal relationships.

I lived for about a year in the closet. Every time I heard a 'queer' joke, I squirmed and wanted to shout, "Stop! It's not true." However, I said nothing--but my silence only increased my feelings of hurt and anger. When people asked about my children I began to notice that one got shortchanged, quickly glossed over for fear that they might ask further questions based on the information I had just shared. I learned how to answer the does-he-have-a-steady-girlfriend question honestly, yet evasively: "No special girl", I would say, "he seems to have a number of friends."

Then one day I read about a support group for parents of lesbians and gays. I went to their next meeting and for the first time in a year I felt understood and accepted by others who had walked in my shoes. It was at those meetings that I began to replace a lifetime of misinformation with reliable facts about homosexuality. There, too, I met other parents who shared my feelings and experiences. Some of them seemed freer of the demons and fears that haunted me. They held out a vision of what was possible for me too.

One feeling that I did recognize was that of being disloyal toward this child whom I loved. I also began to realize that being closeted required emotional and psychic energy that interfered with other close personal relationships. Before I spent an evening with friends, I'd have to recall exactly what I'd told them on previous occasions. On the way home I wondered if what I'd said was consistent with our previous times together.

The secrecy and burden with one close friend became increasingly difficult. I felt disloyal to my son because my silence seemed like an admission that I was ashamed of him. I felt disloyal to my friend because I was keeping a very important part of my life out our friendship. So, I explained to my son that the cost of silence was taking its toll on me. We agreed that I could share with close friends the fact that he was gay, but the disclosure to family members was his responsibility.

The relationship with my friend had evolved both personally and professionally. Our families were close; in fact my son had been a babysitter for his children. I just didn't know how I was going to tell him. One day while at work someone said something in our presence that provided an opportunity to discuss the matter. I only remember that it began awkwardly as I struggled to find the right words--and it became easier as I progressed. He responded as I know he would: surprised, but accepting.

It was over two years ago when I first opened the door of my closet. It was safe to talk to a trusted friend. Just the other day Russ and I were having coffee at work. We were able to talk openly about things that are important to us as parents, as well as matters important to our children, including my son's relationship with his friend.

There's been no standard method of disclosure to close friends; each approach is tailored to the person and the circumstance. There are, however, a few observations that can be made: 1) Generally speaking, the sexual orientation of my son need not be a matter of discussion with anyone. 2) When keeping the secret requires emotional energy and begins to interfere with a close personal friendship, that is perceived as a signal that maybe it's time to re-evaluate the secret. 3) I usually discuss in advance with my wife my need to share with friends we have in common. On one occasion we might approach the matter with them together; in another case we will decide which of us ill' address the issue privately with that person. 4) The occasion for disclosure comes at a time when we are feeling good. 5) The catalyst for disclosure usually arises naturally from the general conversation.

Slowly the door of my closet has opened. Each inch is a liberating experience. Friends now come and ask questions about things related to gay issues they see or read in the media.

I doubt that I'll be fully out of the closet; I have no need to be. I have taken the risk and have not been disappointed. I'm affirmed when people say "I've known your family for years and you have reason to be proud of your children--all of your children."